VISIT…

SHRINE OF THE FEATHERED SERPENT

A Short Adventure for Four 12th-Level Player Characters

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Shrine of the Feathered Serpent is a short adventure for four 12th-level player characters (PCs). The scenario is set in a forested area, and the action takes place in the village of Pearlglen and a nearby, half-ruined temple. As always, feel free to adapt the material presented here as you see fit to make it work with your campaign.

PREPARATION

You, the Dungeon Master (DM) need the D&D core rulebooks—the *Player's Handbook,* the *Dungeon Master's Guide,* and the *Monster Manual*—to run this adventure. This scenario utilizes the D&D v.3.5 rules.

To get started, print out the adventure. Read through the scenario at least once to familiarize yourself with the situation, threats, and major NPCs (particularly their motivations). No map of Pearlglen or the surrounding area is provided, but Hobliah's lair uses the Ancient Temple map from the Map-A-Week feature. A copy is provided for easy reference.

Text that appears in shaded boxes is player information that you can read aloud or paraphrase for the players at the proper times.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Two generations ago, a series of localized but very deadly epidemics plagued the land. In the great cities, experienced clerics and other healers managed to keep the disease at bay. Most rural communities, however, lacked the resources to protect themselves adequately. The residents simply had to hope that their relative isolation and the meager skills of their residents would be enough to preserve them.

One such community was the woodland village of Pearlglen, so named for the freshwater pearls often found in the nearby river. The simple folk of Pearlglen had only their wits and the healing powers of their village priest to protect them. As fate would have it, the plague arrived quite suddenly in Pearlglen, carried by streams of refugees who were fleeing places already afflicted. The old village priest was among the first to succumb to the disease, but on his deathbed, he vowed that his village would not perish.

The very next morning, Pearlglen's savior arrived in the form of Tlanextic, an incredibly beautiful couatl. Tlanextic would not say whether the old priest's prayers had brought him to Pearlglen or whether he had merely been passing by. But whatever his reason for visiting, the couatl proved an excellent

public health officer, and he quickly arranged to treat the afflicted who could be saved and to ease the passing of the doomed. He also made sure that the plague victims were properly buried to stem the spread of the disease. In less than a fortnight, Tlanextic's efforts had blunted the worst effects of the plague, and Pearlglen was disease-free within a month. When he was certain that the danger had passed, Tlanextic took his leave, promising to look in on the village from time to time.

In gratitude, the people of Pearlglen crafted a handsome statue of their savior using hardwood from the forest and pearls from the river. The statue stood in a place of honor in the village shrine, not far from the old priest's tomb. Over the years, Pearlglen became famous as the home of an astonishing couatl statue, and curious onlookers began to visit. Eventually, the church of Pelor expanded the shine and placed a fairly senior cleric there to keep an eye on the relic. In like manner, the village established the Wardens—a sort of local militia—to protect its citizens.

All was calm in Pearlglen for years afterward, and the humans of the village resumed their peaceful existence. In recent years, however, the sylvan folk have begun to consider the village and its environs as a place of nameless dread. Something, it seems, has been stalking the woods and glades surrounding the village—something that kills without mercy or warning and totally consumes its victims. The humanoid folk of the village seem unaffected by this lurking presence and indeed are completely unaware of it. Fey and other woodland beings, however, have learned to give Pearlglen a wide berth.

In fact, a deadly force has been stalking the woods around Pearlglen. The menace is Lerrius, a forest gnome ranger with a wicked streak and a weakness for wealth. Lerrius started as a simple hunter and trapper, but before long he realized that some people would pay dearly for certain exotic items, including unicorn horns and even less savory body parts harvested from the good creatures of the wood. He has become adept at ambushing and slaying such creatures, and even more adept at smuggling his trophies out of the Pearlglen region unseen.

About a month ago, Lerrius met a kindred spirit of sorts—the spirit naga Hobliah. The forest gnome was well aware of Tlanextic's story, and he quickly realized that Hobliah could effectively impersonate the couatl, so long as no one examined her too closely. Lerrius had long been one of Pearlglen's Wardens, so he simply arranged for a fellow warden to stumble across Hobliah (in her couatl guise) in the ruins of an ancient temple not far from the town. At first the warden was skeptical of Hobliah's feathered but wingless form (see area 2 in the shrine description), but the naga's charming gaze power quickly silenced his doubts.

The warden agreed to fetch Kalina, the current village priest, and bring her back to the ancient temple to meet "Tlanextic," who had finally made his promised return. Though she wondered why the couatl would hide in such a remote place, Kalina did pay a visit to the ancient temple, where the spirit naga and the forest gnome had laid a trap for her. She nearly escaped, but Hobliah, Lerrius, and several of their allies managed to subdue her. Once she was in their power, they plied her with *dominate person* spells until she succumbed. The newly dominated Kalina then returned to Pearlglen and announced Tlanextic's return. She also claimed an urgent need to consult with her superiors in a distant city. She instructed her acolyte, Hetagg, to assist the couatl in preparing the village to meet a new threat. Then she hastily departed, leaving Hetagg in charge of the village shrine. Hobliah and her cronies ambushed Kalina on the road, killed her, and stripped her body.

Hobliah and Lerrius next eliminated Haydon, the village's chief warden. They successfully blamed his death on restless corpses that had arisen from the graveyard where the plague victims had been buried.

Once Hetagg had also fallen victim to Hobliah's *dominate person* spells, he and Lerrius went to work. Together they convinced the villagers that an old warding stone that Tlanextic had left behind was failing, and that the "couatl" must quickly make a new one. Such an enterprise takes money, and the villagers have been busy ever since trying to collect it. They have already contributed their statue of Tlanextic and all the ready cash they had available. They have also set up roadblocks around the town so that they can demand a still toll from everyone passing through the village.

Thus far, Hobliah has managed to remain mostly out of the villagers' view. Several of the long-lived residents were around during Tlanextic's original visit, and they have not been allowed to visit Hobliah's lair. The only folk, other than Lerrius and Hetagg, who have been seen Hobliah in her couatl guise are younger folks who can be *charmed* or *dominated.* Hobliah and Lerrius know that they can't keep up their charade forever, but they hope to squeeze as much cash as they can from Pearlglen before moving on to a new scheme.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The PCs must gather enough information in Pearlglen to realize that the trouble stems from the old temple. They must then visit the temple, face and defeat Hobliah and her minions, and inform the villagers of the true situation.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

As DM, you know best how to involve your PCs in an adventure. If desired, however, you can use one of the following suggestions to draw them into the action.

- While traveling near Pearlglen, the PCs encounter a roadblock or patrol and are ordered to pay a toll.
- The characters hear tales of Pearlglen and its marvelous couatl statue, which is reputed to have some miraculous power (perhaps one that the PCs badly need).
- The PCs encounter a fey who tells them of the murderous beast of Pearlglen that stalks and kills sylvan creatures. Perhaps someone sends the characters to search for a recent victim, or perhaps the sylvan folk have had enough of Pearlglen and plan to attack the village unless the PCs can defuse the situation.
- A report from Kalina to her superiors is overdue, and the Temple of Pelor sends the characters to investigate the lapse.

BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

Shrine of the Feathered Serpent is a site-based adventure that begins in the village of Pearlglen and culminates at the nearby temple. When the characters reach Pearlglen, go to encounter A. Use encounters A1, A2, A3, and A4 as needed, whenever the characters visit the locations in question. Use encounter A5 if the PCs have spent a fair amount of time in Pearlglen before deciding to visit the ancient temple (encounter B).

A. PEARLGLEN

Two moderately well-traveled roads meet just outside Pearlglen, and the only ford across the river for several miles lies not far from that crossroads. Read or paraphrase the following when the characters come within sight of Pearlglen.

> A small sign identifies the village ahead as Pearlglen, Home of the Feathered Serpent Statue. Like other villages deep in the forests, this one has a rustic but quaint appearance. Most of the buildings are made of timber, with roofs of thatch that have weathered to a mottled gray color. A low mound of earth topped with a wooden stockade surrounds the settlement.

Pearlglen has long welcomed travelers and visitors who come to view the famous couatl statue. Because of recent events, however, the village isn't so welcoming now. Visitors can still get in, but they must stop and pay the toll—1 silver piece per person, plus 1 silver piece per draft animal and 3 silver pieces per vehicle that approaches the village via the crossroads or the ford.

Inside the village, all goods sell for double the normal price. If anyone complains about these extra expenses, the locals explain that they must raise money quickly. They aren't forthcoming about exactly why they need the cash—they merely mumble something about a "civic project" in answer to probing questions. In truth, the villagers are afraid to mention the possible return of the plague. Some fear that mentioning the epidemic will bring it back again; others just don't want to cause a panic.

♛ **Pearlglen (Village):** Monstrous; AL CE; 200 gp limit; Assets none (normally 4,280 gp); Population 428 adults; Mixed (human 79%, halfling 9%, elf 5%, gnome 3%, dwarf 2%, half-elf 1%, half-orc 1%

Authority Figure: Hobliah (CE female sprit naga sorcerer 3), currently posing as the couatl Tlanextic.

Important Characters: Hetagg (NG male human cleric 2 of Pelor), acting village priest; Lerrius (NE male forest gnome expert 2/ranger 7), acting chief warden.

Village Wardens: 12 expert 2/warrior 2.

The following locales in and near the village might be of some interest to the PCs.

A1. THE VILLAGE TAP

This modest tavern and inn offers decent food, drink, and lodgings, but at double the normal price. A few locals and travelers are always drowning their sorrows in the common room these days. The PCs can learn about recent events in the village if they buy the locals a few drinks (see the Background section for details). If the characters start asking detailed questions, the villagers suggest that they go see Hetagg at the shrine or Lerrius at the blockhouse.

A2. THE SHRINE (EL 2)

This wooden building has a slate roof—the only one in town. These days, the shrine is deserted most of the time. In the main chamber stands an altar dedicated to Pelor and a massive hardwood pedestal that's noticeably empty. (The statue of Tlanextic once stood on this pedestal, but it was given to the false couatl.)

Creature: Hetagg, the acting village priest, spends most of his time puttering in the yard and garden of his house nearby. He eventually comes to greet any visitors to the shrine.

Hetagg: Male human cleric 2; CR 2; Medium humanoid; HD 2d8+2; hp 11; Init +3; Spd 20 ft.; AC 18, touch 9, flat-footed 18; Base Atk +1; Grp +3; Atk or Full Atk +4 melee (1d8+2, masterwork heavy mace) or +1 ranged (1d10/19-20, masterwork heavy crossbow); SA turn undead 4/day (+1, 2d6+3, 2nd); AL NG; SV Fort +4, Ref -1, Will +5; Str 14, Dex 8, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 13.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +4, Diplomacy +6, Heal +5, Jump -19, Knowledge (religion) +3, Sense Motive +4, Spellcraft +3; Improved Initiative, Negotiator.

Cleric Spells Prepared (caster level 2nd): 0—*detect magic, detect poison, light, mending;* 1st—*command* (DC 13), *cure light wounds*^{D}*, divine favor, protection from evil.*

D: Domain spell. Deity: Pelor. Domains: Healing (cast healing spells at +1 caster level), Sun (greater turning against undead 1/day).

Possessions: Half-plate armor, heavy steel shield, masterwork heavy mace, masterwork light crossbow with 10 bolts, *silversheen, potion of delay poison,* 3 scrolls of *cure light wounds,* scroll of *bless weapon,* scroll of *detect undead,* silver holy symbol, 3 sunrods, 2 vials of holy water.

Hetagg is currently under the influence of Hobliah's *dominate person* spell. His instructions are to act naturally but do all he can to help the villagers gather the cash that "Tlanextic" needs to keep the village safe. Because of the spell, Hetagg has an aura of moderate enchantment magic. A successful DC 15 Sense Motive check reveals that an enchantment effect is influencing his behavior . (See the Sense Motive skill description and the *dominate person* spell description for further information.)

Development: So long has he remains dominated, Hetagg says only that evil times have returned to Pearlglen, and that the fate of the village lies with Tlanextic, who is attempting a mighty magic to avert a disaster. He also explains that his superior, Kalina, has left him in charge here while she goes to obtain more assistance for Tlanextic. If asked about the death of Chief Warden Haydon, Hetagg says that restless plague victims from the village cemetery killed him one dark night, not long before Tlanextic's return.

The PCs can remove the *dominate person* effect from Hetagg with *dispel magic, break enchantment,* or *dispel evil.* If freed, Hetagg seems confused, but he knows darn well that Kalina would never have abandoned Pearlglen if she had been acting under her own free will, and he tells the PCs so. He also adds that "Tlanextic" sure doesn't look much like his statue (no wings, for one thing).

Hetagg can't be of much help to the PCs if they try to take on the false Tlanextic, but he's willing to do all he can. At this point, he doesn't suspect Lerrius's role in the deception. Thus, if the PCs decide to confront "Tlanextic," Hetagg suggests that they consult with the forest gnome first.

A3. BLOCKHOUSE (EL 10)

This fortified log house is three stories high and has a roof of sawed planks. It's off limits to the public, but anyone is free to come here and ask for help.

Creatures: Lerrius spends most of his time here when he's not at the temple. If he isn't in the blockhouse at the time the PCs come to call, one of the ten other village wardens can tell them when the gnome is due to return. (Lerrius makes a good show of his new job as chief warden).

Village Wardens (10): Male or female human expert 1/warrior 2; CR 2; Medium humanoid; HD 1d6+1 plus 2d8+2; hp 15; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +2; Grp +4; Atk or Full Atk +5 melee (1d8+2/19-20, masterwork longsword) or +5 ranged (1d8+2/[TS]3, masterwork composite longbow [+2 Str bonus]); AL NG; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +2; Str 15, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Handle Animal +4, Hide +6, Listen +6, Move Silently +6, Ride +8, Sense Motive +4, Spot +6, Survival +4, Swim +3; Alertness, Blind-Fight, Dodge.

Possessions: Masterwork studded leather armor, masterwork buckler, masterwork longsword, masterwork composite longbow (+2 Str bonus) with 20 arrows, *silversheen, oil of magic weapon, potion of cure moderate wounds,* scroll of *bless weapon,* tanglefoot bag, 2 sunrods, 3 vials of holy water.

Lerrius: Male gnome expert 2/ranger 7; CR 8; Small humanoid; HD 2d6+4 plus 7d8+14; hp 56; Init +3; Spd 20 ft.; AC 20, touch 15, flat-footed 17; Base Atk +8; Grp +5; Atk +11 melee (1d6+2/19-20, *+1 longsword)*

or +13 ranged (1d6+2/[TS]3, *+1 composite longbow* [+1 Str bonus]]); Full Atk +11/+6 melee (1d6+2/19-20, *+1 longsword)* or +13/+8 ranged (1d6+2/[TS]3, *+1 composite longbow* [+1 Str bonus]); SA spell-like abilities; SQ animal companion (wolf; link, share spells), favored enemy magical beasts +4, favored enemy fey +2, forest gnome traits, low-light vision, wild empathy +7 (+3 magical beasts); AL NE; SV Fort +7, Ref +8, Will +7 (*+9 against illusions); Str 12, Dex 16, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Craft (furcrafting) +4, Craft (tailoring) +4, Handle Animal +5, Hide +22 (+30 in a wooded area), Jump -11, Knowledge (nature) +7, Listen +15, Move Silently +11, Profession (hunter) +5, Profession (trapper) +5, Ride +5, Search +4, Spot +13, Survival +12; Alertness, Endurance[B], Manyshot[B], Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot[B], Stealthy, Track[B].

Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day—*speak with animals* (burrowing mammal only, duration 1 minute).

Animal Companion (Ex): Lerrius has a wolf named Aratia as an animal companion (see *Monster Manual,* page 283). The companion's abilities and characteristics are summarized below.

Aratia: Female wolf companion; CR —; Medium animal; HD 4d8+8; hp 26; Init +3; Spd 50 ft.; AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +3; Grp +5; Atk +6 melee (1d6+3, bite); SA trip; SQ evasion, low-light vision, scent; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +2; Str 14, Dex 16, Con 15, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 6.

Skills and Feats: Hide +4 (+8 in wooded areas), Listen +3, Move Silently +4, Spot +3, Survival +2; Dodge, Track[B], Weapon Focus (bite).

Trip (Ex): When Aratia hits with a bite attack, she can attempt to trip the opponent (+2 check modifier) without making a touch attack or provoking an attack of opportunity. If the attempt fails, the opponent cannot react to trip Aratia.

Evasion (Ex): If Aratia is exposed to any effect that normally allows her to attempt a Reflex saving throw for half damage, she takes no damage with a successful saving throw.

Animal Companion Benefits (Ex): Lerrius and Aratia enjoy the link and share spells special qualities.

Link (Ex): Lerrius can handle Aratia as a free action. He also gains a +4 circumstance bonus on all wild empathy checks and Handle Animal checks made regarding his wolf.

Share Spells (Ex): Lerrius may have any spell he casts on himself also affect his animal companion if the latter is within 5 feet at the time. He may also cast a spell with a target of "You" on his animal companion.

Favored Enemy (Ex): Lerrius gains a +4 bonus on his Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks when using these skills against magical beasts. He gains the same bonus on weapon damage.

Against fey, he gains a +2 bonus on these skill checks and on weapon damage rolls.

Forest Gnome Traits: Lerrius has a +1 racial bonus on attack rolls against kobolds, goblinoids, orcs, and reptilian humanoids, a +4 racial bonus to Armor Class against giants, and a +2 racial bonus on saving throws against illusions*. He also has the innate ability to use *pass without trace* (as the spell, caster level 9th) and a +4 racial bonus on Hide checks, which improves to +8 in a wooded area (already figured into the statistics given above).

Woodland Stride (Ex): Lerrius may move through natural thorns, briars, overgrown areas, and similar terrain at his normal speed and without damage or other impairment. However, thorns, briars, and overgrown areas that are magically manipulated to impede motion still affect him.

Ranger Spells Prepared:(caster level 7th): 1st—*longstrider, resist energy.*

Possessions: +1 studded leather armor, +1 buckler, ring of protection +1, +1 longsword, +1 composite longbow (+1 Str bonus), *periapt of Wisdom +2, potion of barkskin, potion of cure moderate wounds, potion of cure light wounds, potion of magic fang,* 14 pp, 16 gp, 20 sp.

Tactics: Lerrius doesn't really want to fight. If a fight breaks out in spite of his best efforts to placate the party (see below), he tries to hang back and fire arrows while his troops do the fighting. When defeat becomes inevitable, Lerrius casts his *longstrider* spell and tries to flee to the ancient temple.

Development: If questioned about the recent events in Pearlglen, Lerrius pretends to know very little. If the PCs insist on seeing the "couatl," the gnome says he would be happy to write them a short letter of introduction, and he offers to take them to graveyard (area A4) if they wish.

A4. THE GRAVEYARD

This open cemetery lies across the river from the village. Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs visit.

The grass in the cemetery is well tended, and the wooden grave markers are kept free of dirt. A big mound at the south end of the graveyard bears a wooden plaque inscribed with the names of those who died in the epidemic two generations ago. One section of the mound looks like it has recently been dug up and then restored.

Any local (including Lerrius, if he is present) can tell the PCs that a horde of skeletons emerged from the mound at that spot and attacked Chief Warden Haydon about two weeks ago. The whole area has been well trampled, and no clues remain.

In fact, Lerrius and the gargoyles from the shrine (see encounter B) dug into the mound and unearthed several skeletons, which Hobliah then animated. The two conspirators then set the skeletons on Haydon and joined the attack themselves.

Development: Haydon's fresh grave is easy to find, along with those of his troops (eight village wardens). Neither Lerrius nor Hetagg is willing to let the PCs exhume the bodies, but they could slip back here late at night and dig them up anyway. If they try to do so, they discover that someone has beaten them to it—the graves are empty. Lerrius and a group of *charmed* and *dominated* villages robbed the graves and dumped the bodies in the forest so that the PCs wouldn't be able to examine them.

A5. AMBUSH (EL 10)

If the PCs spend too much time nosing around Pearlglen, Lerrius gets a good idea of their power and decides to arrange a little surprise for them when they finally set out for the temple.

The path to the ruined temple winds through wooded hills choked with thorny undergrowth. The terrain seems firm underfoot, and some bits of pavement have survived here and there, but the evidence—mostly in the form of freshly cut branches overhanging the trail—suggests that the way has been cleared only recently.

Just around a bend in an area with particularly big trees and dense undergrowth, two massive bears are feasting on a pile of berries. They don't seem interested in sharing their repast.

This ambush is meant to sap the PCs' resources before they arrive at the temple.

Creatures: The bears are dire bears that Lerrius has secretly befriended. The gnome ranger is hidden on a platform about 30 feet above the ground and 40 feet off the trail. Lerrius's wolf companion guards the base of his tree.

Lerrius: hp 56; see encounter A3.

Dire Bears (2): hp 105 each, see *Monster Manual,* page 63.

Tactics: The bears simply attack the closest intruders while Lerrius keeps up a steady fire from his tree. His Precise Shot feat allows him to fire into melee without penalty, but he prefers to leave the party's fighting types to the bears while he peppers the spellcasters with arrows. If his first few shots hit, he may bring his Rapid Shot feat into play.

The bears fight to the death. Lerrius sticks around until the bears have been defeated, then casts *longstrider* and tries to slip away to the temple. He counts on his spell and his woodland stride ability to stay ahead of pursuit. If followed, he sticks to areas choked with brush and may try to use his Hide skill to vanish for awhile.

Development: If Lerrius escapes from this encounter, he runs ahead and warns Hobliah. He stays at the temple so as to be present for the party's final showdown with the naga.

B. THE ANCIENT TEMPLE

The PCs can get directions to the temple from any villager, though nobody seems very anxious to have them visit the place. (Once again, the villagers mutter something about a "civic project.")

The descriptive text for the shrine and its various encounter areas assumes that the PCs visit during the day, when Hobliah is impersonating the couatl Tlanextic. The Creatures and Development sections for each encounter area include notes on any changes that apply if the visit occurs at night.

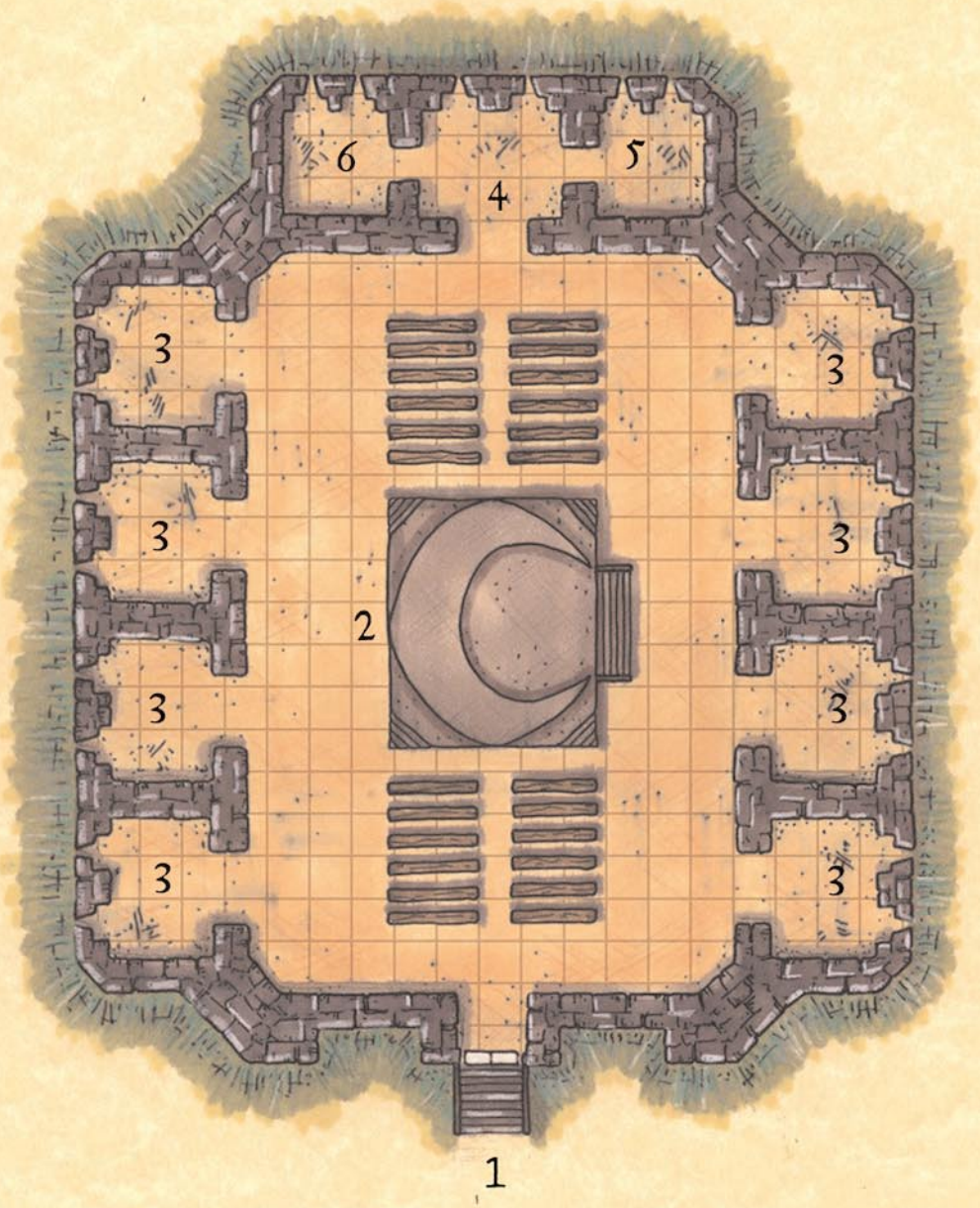
B1. MAIN ENTRANCE (EL 3)

Read aloud or paraphrase the following when the PCs arrive at the temple.

A short flight of steps leads up to a pair of moss-covered wooden doors. The right-hand door stands open. Many cracks and pockmarks scar the stone steps, but they otherwise seem solid. Stone balustrades about 3 feet high, just as weathered as the steps themselves, flank the staircase. Two armed and armored humans, bedecked with flowers, stand rigidly before the doorway.

The stairs rise about 6 feet and are perfectly safe, though characters cannot run or charge when traversing them.

THE TEMPLE



The doors were once clad in copper, but the sheathing was stripped away long ago. A DC 15 Search check reveals holes in the rotten wood and a few broken-off nails where the sheathing was once attached.

The left-hand door is firmly closed. Hobliah and her minions have wedged it shut.

Jammed and Rotted Wooden Door: 3 in. thick; hardness 5; hp 15; break DC 16.

The right-hand door is not only open, it has been wrenched off its hinges and loosely propped up next to the doorway. A firm push or pull shifts it, but it falls over when disturbed unless someone steadies it (DC 10 Strength check required). Hobliah has affixed a *stone of alarm* to the door. The stone activates when anyone touches the door without speaking its command word ("Bring me the moon," spoken in Draconic).

Creatures: During the day, two village wardens pressed into service as doormen for "Tlanextic." Watch over the entryway. At night, the stairs are empty.

Doormen (2): hp 15 each, see encounter A3.

Tactics: The doormen command all who approach to halt and state their names before coming into the presence of the great and beneficent Tlanextic. If anyone tries to push past them, they do their best to block the entrance. If attacked, they use the full defense action but otherwise block the entry until killed. Both doormen are victims of Hobliah's *dominate person* spells, and their orders are to announce visitors who state their names and to allow no others to pass. If questioned about the shrine, they refer all inquiries to great and beneficent Tlanextic, who holds court within the shrine.

Development: If the PCs come here at night, the guards are gone and the right hand door is loosely propped up in the doorway. The PCs can easily move it but doing so triggers the *stone of alarm* attached to it, as noted above.

If the PCs set off the *stone of alarm,* all the temple residents become aware of their intrusion. If they manage to avoid triggering the stone but otherwise make a lot of noise (by smashing down the jammed door or fighting the doormen, for example), the creatures in areas B2, B3, B5, and B6 are alerted.

The doormen ignore any sounds they hear from inside the shrine. If someone exits the shrine through this door, they're friendly enough, but they allow no one to re-enter without going through the process again.

B2. WORSHIP CHAMBER (EL 9 OR 13)

This area is where Hobliah holds court. Read aloud or paraphrase the following when the PCs enter.

> The scent of flowers perfumes the air in this lofty but somewhat dank chamber. The scent seems to come from dozens—or perhaps hundreds—of flowery bouquets heaped on a massive central altar, which resembles a low ziggurat with three tiers, each perhaps 10 feet high. The altar and the double rows of moss-covered wooden pews flanking it fill the chamber's center. A steep flight of stairs runs up one side of the ziggurat.
>
> The many gaps in the high, vaulted ceiling leave the chamber open to the elements. Random shafts of sunlight create a dappled effect on the walls and floor
>
> A magnificent, feathered serpent lies coiled among the flowers atop the altar, gazing out over the chamber with an air of utter self-assurance. Its feathers look particularly dazzling where the light strikes them.

Characters who see this area from above or who take a moment to look around can easily spot the many exits—four to the east, four to the west, one to the north, and one to the south, as shown on the map.

Creatures: During the day, Hobliah the spirit naga rests atop the altar, using a *disguise self* spell to look something like a couatl. Unlike a real couatl, however, she has no wings, since the illusion of such appendages is beyond the power of her spell. Like all spirit nagas, Hobliah has a charnel scent about her, but the flowers mask it.

Hobliah is effectively disguised as a couatl, but anyone interacting with her can make a Spot check opposed by her Disguise check to note that something's not quite right. For this purpose, Hobliah's Disguise check bonus is +13. A DC 15 Knowledge (the planes) check reveals that the creature on the ziggurat looks very like a wingless couatl.

At night, four gargoyles perch on the altar's middle tier, one at each corner. They use their freeze ability to look like grotesque statues—a somewhat incongruous sight among all the flowers. Hobliah spends her nights in area B5.

Hobliah: Female spirit naga sorcerer 3; CR 12; Large aberration; HD 9d8+45 plus 3d4+15; hp 107; Init +3; Spd 40 ft.; AC 18, touch 12, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +7; Grp +14; Atk or Full Atk +9 melee (2d6+4 plus poison, bite); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA charming gaze, poison, spells; SQ darkvision 60 ft., familiar (Mukalla), familiar benefits (Alertness, deliver touch spells, empathic link, share spells); AL CE; SV Fort +9, Ref +9, Will +13; Str 16, Dex 17, Con 20, Int 12, Wis 19, Cha 21.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +11, Climb +6, Concentration +14, Diplomacy +7, Hide -1, Intimidate +7, Jump +7, Knowledge (arcana) +4, Listen +15, Spellcraft +10, Spot +15; Ability Focus (charming gaze), Alertness, Combat Casting, Eschew Materials[B], Heighten Spell, Lightning Reflexes.

Charming Gaze (Su): This effect functions like *charm person* (range 30 feet, Will DC 21 negates).

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 19, initial and secondary damage 1d8 Con.

Spells: Hobliah's three sorcerer levels stack with her racial spellcasting ability, allowing her to cast spells as a 10th-level sorcerer. She can also cast spells from the cleric spell list and from the Chaos and Evil domains as arcane spells. The cleric spells and domain spells are considered arcane spells for her, meaning that she does not need a divine focus to cast them.

Familiar: Hobliah's familiar is a lizard named Mukalla. The familiar uses the better of his own and Hobliah's base save bonuses. The creature's abilities and characteristics are summarized below.

Mukalla: Male lizard familiar; CR —; Tiny magical beast; HD 1/2 d8 (effectively 6d8); hp 53; Init +2; Spd 20 ft., climb 20 ft.; Base Atk +7; Grp -5; AC 16, touch 14, flat-footed 14; Atk or Full Atk +11 melee (1d4-4, bite); Space/Reach 2-1/2 ft./0 ft.; SQ improved evasion, low-light vision; AL CE; SV Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +10; Str 3, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 7, Wis 12, Cha 2.

Skills and Feats: Balance +10, Bluff +2, Climb +10, Concentration +9, Hide +10, Listen +10, Spot +10; Weapon Finesse.

Improved Evasion (Ex): If Mukalla is exposed to any effect that normally allows him to attempt a Reflex saving throw for half damage, he takes no damage with a successful saving throw and half damage if the saving throw fails.

Skills: Mukalla has a +8 racial bonus on Balance and Climb checks. He uses his Dexterity modifier instead of his Strength modifier for Climb checks.

Familiar Benefits: Hobliah gains special benefits from having a familiar. This creature grants her a +3 bonus on Climb checks (included in the above statistics).

Alertness (Ex): Mukalla grants his master Alertness as long as he is within 5 feet.

Deliver Touch Spells (Su): Mukalla can deliver touch spells for Hobliah.

Empathic Link (Su): Hobliah can communicate telepathically with her familiar at a distance of up to 1 mile. The master has the same connection to an item or a place that the familiar does.

Share Spells (Su): Hobliah may have any spell she casts on herself also affect her familiar if the latter is within 5 feet at the time. She may also cast a spell with a target of "You" on her familiar.

Sorcerer Spells Known (6/8/7/7/6/4 per day; caster level 10th): 0—*acid splash, daze* (DC 15), *detect magic, disrupt undead, guidance, mage hand, message, open/close, read magic;* 1st—*chill touch* (+9 melee touch, DC 16), *disguise self, magic missile, shield, Tenser's floating disk;* 2nd—*glitterdust* (DC 17), *levitate, scorching ray* (+10 ranged touch), *see invisibility;* 3rd—*animate dead, displacement, haste;* 4th—*Evard's black tentacles, unholy blight* (DC 19); 5th—*dominate person* (DC 20).

Possessions: Major circlet of blasting, potion of cure moderate wounds, potion of magic fang, silver necklace set with obsidian (190 gp).

Tactics: Hobliah spends a round or two posing as a couatl, just to size up the PCs, then attacks, calling for help from her allies in areas 3 and 6. She knows she can't fool anyone for long, and besides, she is greedy enough that she wants to loot the PCs' bodies.

Hobliah begins her assault by using her charming gaze power on a physically powerful character, such as a fighter or a barbarian. If this tactic works, she invites the character to go take a look at the "treasure" in area 6. If the character leaves the room without provoking a counterattack from the PCs, she tries the same tactic again, this time directing her victim to area 3 (the most distant of these chambers).

Once a battle begins in earnest, Hobliah uses *scorching ray* (or a ray from her circlet) against spellcasting types and *dominate person* against more physical characters until the gargoyles from area 3 and the behir from area 6 arrive. Lerrius may also be present if he arranged an ambush for the PCs earlier (see encounter A5). When all her allies have arrived, Hobliah casts *haste* on herself and as many allies as she can manage. After that, she uses *Evard's black tentacles* to keep foes away from her and to interfere with enemy spellcasters, and *unholy blight* to break up groups of foes. (Because her allies are evil, they aren't affected by the latter spell.) If subjected to physical attacks, Hobliah protects herself with *displacement.*

See areas 3 and 6 for the tactics that the gargoyles and the behir use.

B3. GARGOYLE CHAMBERS (EL 4 OR 8)

These areas once served as side chapels and meditation rooms, but they were looted long ago. Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs enter.

> The air in here seems cool and dank, despite sunlight streaming in from a pair of arrow slits in the walls and numerous cracks in the roof. A thick layer of stone debris, old leaves, and creeping vines covers the floor. Amid all that stands a grotesque-looking statue.

Several of Hobliah's allies use this chamber as a lair.

Creatures: A single gargoyle stands watch in each of these areas during the day. At night, four of the gargoyles stand on the altar in area 2 instead.

Gargoyles (8): hp 37 each, see *Monster Manual,* page 113.

Tactics: The gargoyles watch for intruders trying to sneak in through the arrow slits and also keep an eye on area 2. They don't have much stomach for fighting, except in a group. When danger threatens one of them, it retreats to area 2, screeching at the top of its lungs for its compatriots. Once the gargoyles have assembled into a group, they try to avoid the most physically powerful characters and reach any spellcasters in the party, using their flight ability to get into position. They also try to flank their foes, and if necessary, they use the aid another action to help each other's attacks.

Development: The gargoyles' screeching also alerts the other denizens of the shrine to the presence of intruders.

B4. ANTECHAMBER

This area holds a basin that was once used to create and store unholy water. Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs enter.

> A dry, cracked basin stands atop a low stone pedestal. The remains of a stone lid, broken into several pieces, lie nearby.

Hobliah and her minions have shifted this pedestal several times to hide their treasure beneath it. This motion has left behind scratches that the PCs can find with a DC 20 Search check. Moving the pedestal requires a DC 20 Strength check.

Development: If the PCs begin fiddling with the pedestal, the creatures in the adjacent areas notice and move to attack, calling to the gargoyles in area 3 to assist them.

Treasure: A hollow under the basin's pedestal holds the loot that Hobliah has managed to glean from the residents of Pearlglen. The stash includes 21 freshwater pearls (worth 10 gp each), 228 sp, a silver holy symbol of Pelor, a suit of *+1 full plate armor,* a *+1 heavy steel shield,* and a *+1 heavy mace.*(The holy symbol and magic items were looted from Kalina's body.)

B5. HOBLIAH'S CHAMBER (EL 12 OR 0)

This room now serves as the spirit naga's lair.

> Some luxury does exist among these ruins. The walls of this chamber are cracked and water-stained, and the whole place reeks faintly of rotten meat. Still, fresh rushes cover the floor, and a massive oak table, polished to a mirror shine, stands in the center of the room. Atop the table is an exquisite statue of a winged serpent with iridescent feathers in all the colors of the rainbow. The room's furnishings also include a massive cushion covered with fine woolen cloth, a copper brazier, and a scuttle filled with charcoal.

Hobliah chose this chamber for herself because the roof is more or less intact and the room is comfortably dry. The charnel stench is an after-effect of her presence.

Creatures: Hobliah spends her time in this chamber when she is not masquerading as Tlanextic. During the day, she sits atop the altar in area 2.

Hobliah: hp 107; see area B2.

Tactics: If cornered in here, Hobliah uses the same tactics as she does in area B2, except that she is more likely to use her *displacement* spell quickly. She might also use *levitate* to get out of reach.

Treasure: The statue on the table depicts Tlanextic. The people of Pearlglen made it two generations ago to honor the being who saved them from the great plague (see the Background section). Made from fine hardwood clad in mother-of-pearl and studded with freshwater pearls, the piece is worth 1,500 gp.

B6. BEHIR CHAMBER (EL 8)

This chamber resembles area 3, except that a pile of loose rubble, about waist-high to a human, is heaped on the floor.

Creatures: A behir allied with Hobliah lives here.

Behir: hp 94, see *Monster Manual,* page 25.

Tactics: If the behir faces a single opponent (for example, if Hobliah sends a *charmed* character in here), it tries to constrict and claw its foe. If faced with a fairly small number of foes, it may try to swallow one whole,

then constrict. Against a larger group of foes, the behir uses its breath weapon before entering melee.

Development: The creatures in the adjacent areas notice any fighting in here and move to attack, calling to the gargoyles in area 3 to assist them. Likewise, the behir is quick to join any combat nearby. It also answers Hobliah's call if she shouts for aid from area 2 or 5.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Once the PCs defeat Hobliah, the adventure is effectively over. The naga's *charm* and *dominate person* effects quickly wear off, and her former victims soon recover enough of their wits to piece together what has happened to them. If Lerrius survives, he is wise enough to flee the area.

The PCs can keep any loot they recover during this adventure, though the people of Pearlglen would like their statue back and also would appreciate the return of Kalina's gear. The villagers promise to pay the PCs the full value of what they have recovered, and they do so, but it takes them months to gather that much cash. However, the church of Pelor may intervene with some financial assistance (see Further Adventures, below).

FURTHER ADVENTURES

If the characters comb the forest near Pearlglen for a few days, they can recover the bodies of Kalina, Haydon, and the missing wardens. They also meet several dire animals, lycanthropes, and perhaps even a green dragon—all "friends" of Lerrius. They might also encounter the real Tlanextic. Having heard rumors of Pearlglen's new troubles, he has returned to check them out and is grateful to the PCs for setting things straight. But the PCs might justly harbor some doubts about the couatl after what they have been through, and their suspicions could lead to complications down the road.

Lerrius himself holds no special grudge against Pearlglen or the PCs, but he has an active mind and a greedy streak, which might eventually lead to another meeting with the PCs if he has survived.

If the PCs recover the missing bodies and return Kalina's gear and the couatl statue to the village, the church of Pelor ensures that Kalina is raised from the dead and awards the PCs 12,000 gp as a reward for their selflessness. Church officials also remember the PCs as do-gooders and troubleshooters to whom they can turn in the future, when other dangerous problems need solving.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies, and he served as the sage of DRAGON® Magazine for eighteen years. Skip is a co-designer of the D&D 3rd edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual.* When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.